



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE "NEW" IN THE OLD.

BY ANDREW LANG.

"MANY things are not so new as we fancy," said a lady lately; "I have been reading in a sermon that the Hermits suffered dreadfully from low spirits." The lady might have found plenty of historical low spirits, as in Lucretius's description of *ennui*. But things more professionally "new" are old enough.

As Mr. Higgins, of St. Mary Axe, says in his preface to *The Last of the Triangles* (1798), "what you" (the Tories) "call the *new principles* are, in fact, nothing less than *new*. They are the principles of nature." Thus the absence of any matrimonial tie, so dear to the new man and woman, is only that old state of promiscuity, with which Mr. McLennan thought that mankind began, though Darwin and Westermarck disagree. The absence of private (or any other) property is not a new ideal. Give a Fuegian a blanket. His group tear it into shreds and distribute it.

Let us not, however, go back so far, but begin our researches just a century ago. In the *Antijacobin* we find—see *The Rovers*, or *The Double Arrangement*—a satire on Ibsenism before Ibsen was born. The object of the author of *The Rovers* is Dr. Ibsen's; it is to inculcate "a wild desire of indefinable latitude and extravagance . . . a contemptuous disgust at all that *is*, and a persuasion that nothing is as it ought to be." Says Mr. Higgins, "I hold every government as an evil in itself," to be abated by force, if practicable, if not, "by didactic poems." We now prefer didactic novels, and didactic "problem" plays, *The Woman Who Did*, etc., but the noble principle is the same.

The new is the old! Every man or woman cannot be a tyrannicide, but every man can be a footpad, every married

woman can break the seventh commandment ; every girl can, if she has the force of character, dispense her caresses as the modest violet distributes her perfume. Mr. Grant Allen might have written these beautiful lines on the Arcadian manners of Tahiti :

“ Learn hence, each Nymph, whose free, aspiring mind,
Europe’s cold law and colder customs bind,
O ! learn what Nature’s genial laws decree—
What Otaheite is, let Britain be ! ”

Our newest teacher could not denounce more feelingly than Mr. Higgins the condition of affairs in which we see

“ One man, with one unceasing wife,
Play the long rubber of connubial life.”

In *The Rovers*, the stage directions, so valuable for their conscientious minuteness, might have come from the pen of Ibsen himself. Observe, too, that careful blending of the ordinary—snobs would say the vulgar—with the lofty expression of the highest emotion. Matilda is “ in love with Rogero, and mother of the children of Casimere.” What a tragedy is in these simple words ! To be sure, Matilda is not married to Casimere ; that outrage is avoided by the delicacy of the poet. In our new work Matilda would be the wife of Casimere as well as the mother of his offspring, while, of course, “ in love with Rogero.” Cecilia is Casimere’s wife. The ladies meet, and swear eternal friendship, at an inn.

“ Landlady enters and places a leg of mutton on the table, with sour *krout* and prune sauce ; then a small dish of black puddings.”

Such is Life !

Casimere arrives, hears that Matilda is present.

Cas. Ecstasy ! Ecstasy !

[*Embracing the waiter.*]

Landlady. You seem to be acquainted with the lady. Shall I call her ?

Cas. Instantly—instantly—tell her her lover—her long lost—tell her—

Land. Shall I tell her dinner is ready ?

Cas. Do so ; and in the meanwhile I will look after my portmanteaus.

“ An arrangement is finally made by which the ladies are to live jointly with Casimere,” as in Goethe’s *Stella*. Nothing can be more “ New.”

When our New Woman is not proposing to herself and her readers a reversion to the ancient system of polyandry (on which

consult McLennan, Westermarck, Morgan, and Bachofen), she is apt to disdain and shrink from the atrocious and oppressive male sex. She is not so New but that Mrs. Mary Astell was before her, in 1709. Mrs. Mary "proposed a sort of female college, in which ladies nauseating the parade of the world might find a happy retirement." Queen Anne meant to endow this establishment, but Bishop Burnet persuaded her that it savored of Popery. Sir Walter Scott (who had nothing New about him) speaks of Mrs. Mary as a *Précieuse*, who is anxious to confound the boundaries which nature has fixed for the employments and studies of the two sexes. Swift laughed at Mrs. Mary in the *Tatler* (No. XXXII.). But the New woman who spurns the degrading coarseness of matrimony has closer patterns in Molière's Cathos and Madelon (*Les Précieuses Ridicules*, 1659). These ladies express themselves with such virtuous freedom that I could not quote them unless I were a New lady novelist, writing in a new *Key-Hole Series*. The student is, therefore, blushing referred to the original drama by the unprincipled Poquelin. For Molière, too, had nothing New about him; he laughed at these original delicacies of sentiment.

The New young lady in society is remarked for the generous breadth of her language and the large frolic of her wit. But, alas! even this is not so very new. In the correspondence of Lady Suffolk (1714-1760), we find the maids of honor, led by the oldest and most prudish, Miss Meadows, larking about on a winter night, outside Kensington Palace, knocking on the panes and throwing open the windows of the inmates. Nothing can be more in the modern taste. I read, in a periodical devoted to the intellectual needs of woman, *The Lady's Realm*, that the most popular and most justly popular lady in England excels in the confection of "Apple-Pie Beds." I don't believe it, of course, but this news is of the kind that women love.

For a modern freedom of speech in the fair, see the ancient model, in the letters of beautiful, jolly Mary Bellenden (1720). What a breadth of phrase: alas, that the editor can only represent it by intelligible asterisks! Then, on the Newest morals, consult the epistles of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu.

"To speak plainly, I am very sorry for the forlorn state of matrimony, which is as much ridiculed by our young ladies as it used to be by young fellows."

Here her Ladyship gives examples, which, writing in quite an old periodical, I may not venture to cite.

"You may imagine we married women look very silly; we have nothing to excuse ourselves, but that it was done a great while ago, and we were very young when we did it."

Our married women, among the emancipated students of the new fiction, are obliged, like Lady Mary, to urge these frivolous palliations of their fault; of the ludicrous and impure situation in which they find themselves. When Miss Howe, about 1723, giggled ostentatiously in church, the Duchess of St. Albans told her that "it was the very worst thing that she could do."

"Oh, dear madam, no; I can do many things worse than *that*," replied Miss Howe, in all the pride of Novelty. So she went and did them, and then, with deplorable inconsistency, died of a broken heart. Let a New writer give us an historical novel on poor Miss Howe, a kind of pioneer or protomartyr of New women. One reads her letters, skittish letters, and one sees modern new young ladies frisking as gaily, down a path as flowery, surrounded by applause. Then, suddenly, shoulders are shrugged, and everybody says, "Poor Miss Howe!" No reflection is intended on the Maids of Honor, to which body Miss Howe belonged. Then there were Miss Biddy Noel and Miss Dolly Walpole (sister of the Minister), all as new and bright as a new shilling, but all victims to the Nemesis of Novelty.

The constitution of things appears to be against it. It leads, as A. K. H. B.'s Scotch minister said, "to the rop, the rahzor, or the ruvver," or at least to twinkling out, like a candle at a feast, into an unfragrant social darkness.

As to religious disbelief, and the Newness of that admired opinion, read Dean Swift's "argument to prove that the abolishing of Christianity in England may, as things now stand, be attended with some inconvenience, and perhaps not produce those many good effects proposed thereby" (1708). Swift admits that "a design to oppose the current of the people, besides the folly of it, is a manifest breach of the fundamental law which makes this majority of opinion the voice of God."

Swift was old-fashioned; we now speak of opposing the voice of science. Thus Professor James, of Harvard, in audaciously putting forth certain ideas which (if inconsiderately accepted) might lead us to the belief in a God, and even in the soul, re-

marks that he is very sensible of his danger. Many of his readers will appeal, in a shocked manner, to science, and cry, "Away with this antediluvian babble!" Mr. James, in fact, occupies much the same position as Swift holds in his celebrated argument. "I hope," says the Dean, "no reader imagines me so weak as to stand up in defence of real Christianity; . . . to offer at the restoring of that would be, indeed, a wild project." The ideas which Swift ventures to oppose were, he tells us, of a moderate novelty in his own time. He has heard it affirmed for certain, by very old people, that, even in their memories, a proposal to abolish Christianity would have appeared singular, and even absurd. The Gospel, however, is now repudiated "among the mass or body of the common people, who are grown as much ashamed of it as their betters." And all this, as we may say, was arrived at "by the mere force of natural abilities, without the least tincture of learning," still less of science, to which Professor James assumes such a deplorable attitude of distrust, not hesitating even to speak freely about Mr. Herbert Spencer! I conceive, then, that the newest of us, however well seen in the doctrine of molecules, should remember that it is not enough to be New, but that we should also be modest. Let "the ordinary cocksure evolutionist" (as Professor James put it) reflect that, with all his laboratories and biblical criticism, he has climbed no higher, and can deny religion no more absolutely and contemptuously than the mass of the common people did, under Queen Anne, and that without any aid from microscopes, X-rays, black boards, or popular lectures. This I consider a very salutary reflection.

My censors, if they deign to reply to me, will urge that because the New Ideas are not really new it does not follow that they may not be true. Here they have me with them. Age has nothing to do with the matter. I would be the last to venture myself against "the current of the people"; or, as we now say, the *Zeitgeist*, by maintaining that blasphemy, adultery, rapine, and sedition are not things excellent in themselves, and highly characteristic of aspiring freedom. I am not so blind to the lessons of history. My private tastes incline, to be sure, in an opposite direction; like Swift, "I know not how, whether from the affectation of singularity or the perverseness of human nature." This, however, is a mere "personal bias," the result, I think, of a confined education. When my more advanced friends tell me

how much they suffer at the sight of married people, at the nonsense which they would hear if they ever went to church, at the ridiculous constraints placed on the personal liberty of even the very prettiest and most liberal-minded young ladies, at the odious "taboo" which obliges us to wear clothes in Piccadilly (and that in the warmest weather), at the obsolete survival which prevents them from walking into Mr. Giuliano's shop and helping themselves to his enamels, I sympathize with them deeply. Their free impulses (as sacred to a Christian as my own) are cruelly thwarted. The most agreeable lady whom they know may be Another's, which is manifestly absurd. She ought, of course, to be theirs till one of them wants to be somebody else's. This is an intelligible posture of opinion; nor would I offend the popular current by calling it "immoral," or by using other hard words. But when I repeat that these ideas, however obvious and soaring, are *not* New, my first object is to subdue spiritual pride. My friends go about thanking the Nature of Things that they are not as other men, or even as that Squire, that attached married couple, or that Philistine. They are New! To this I answer (and I prove it from history) that they are *not* New, and therefore have the less cause for a kind of Pharisaical exultation.

Permit me to choose a minor instance. How often do you hear a gentleman or lady remark, with a manifest complacency, "Oh, I have no time for reading anything but the newspapers." This sounds highly modern, and gives a fine idea of the many and useful occupations of the speaker. But it is not New! Fielding, in *The True Patriot* (November 5, 1745), says that he means to accommodate himself to the times, and is informed "by my bookseller, a man of great sagacity in his business, *that nobody at present reads anything but the newspapers:*" to be sure Prince Charles was marching on London, and *that* news (*Oh, mon Prince!*) deserved perusal. However, Fielding adds (and the remark is not uncommon) that in his bookseller's opinion the newspapers are recommended by "their eminent badness." The same reason is at present given for the happy success of Mr. A's and Miss B's novels.

I have shown that the New is the old fashioned, and I have also proved that polyandry, free love, sedition, scepticism, and "bear-fighting" by the Maids of Honor, are not new, but of a

hoary antiquity. Thus, even the youngest among us may abate his conceit of his own originality. The practices of adultery, blasphemy, petty larceny, and simple bad manners will, believe me, be infinitely more alluring, more apt to entice proselytes, if pursued without an air of arrogance, without a displayed contempt of others, whose course of conduct may be different.

We owe a certain respect to prejudices which may be the result of heredity and of education. When I see an aged Duke feebly lamenting that his daughter, Lady Gwendoline, has eloped with a popular lecturer whom (to his great embarrassment) she firmly declines to marry, my smile of scorn for the mourner is tempered by the voice of tolerance. The Duke is a dotard of another generation. A regard for what he (absurdly enough) calls "the honor of his house," is congenital with him, as a taste for liquor may be with a person whose great aunt was a confirmed dipsomaniac. Science herself (unless I misread her) justifies a sentiment of toleration to those old-fashioned prejudices.

These antiquarian musings tend to discourage pride in the novelty of our modern attainments. These, as I demonstrate, are not New. "Do the Atridæ alone of men love their wives?" asked Achilles, in an old-fashioned poem, *The Iliad*. Are the disciples of the new ideas the first who have loved the wives of other people? Certainly not. All these new virtues have not only been tried, but have actually been practised as institutions, though for some mysterious reason (which a superstitious age might have attributed to the direct machinations of the devil) these practices and institutions did not prosper. They perished in the struggle for existence. This does seem to carry a presumption that these haggard old New Ideas may not be precisely adapted for use in the world "as God made it," or if you please, as it has been evolved. This is singular and disappointing; however, by all means let us give the New Ideas a fair chance. Our old moralists declaim against them. Swift and Molière and Canning treated them with raillery. It is curious to see how this manner has gone out, and to watch the owl-like gravity of our modern criticism.

ANDREW LANG.